



Administrative Policies and Procedures: 16.37

Subject: Life Story Books

Supersedes: DCS 16.37, 10/01/01

Local Policy: No

Local Procedures: No

Training Required: No

Applicable Practice Model Standard(s): Yes

Approved by:

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Application

To All Department of Children's Services Program Operations Case Managers, Foster Parents and Children in State Custody/Foster Care

Authority: TCA 37-5-106

Policy

Case management employees that work with foster children and foster parents shall assist each child placed in DCS Foster Care to preserve and document his/her history while in custody, by keeping a record with pictures and other significant memorabilia, as well as any photos, documents, and information regarding his or her birth family and circumstances prior to entering DCS custody.

Procedures

A. Purpose

1. The purpose of the Life Story Book is to document and preserve the history of a child in DCS custody/foster care. It should be created with the child's active participation and may include material to improve self-esteem and to help the child prepare for the future. The focus is the child's feelings and understanding of major life events, through the interpretation of these events.
2. The Life Story Book addresses self-concept issues relating to the child's identity. It helps the child to:
 - ◆ Understand separation,
 - ◆ Gain a sense of "who am I and how did I get here?" and

- ◆ Gives hope for what future plans may be.

3. The Life Story Book development is a process that is timed at the child's pace and generally includes:
 - a) Meeting with the child, birth parents, and foster parents (not necessarily at the same time) to discuss the purpose of the Life Story Book and what the work together will be like.
 - b) Research of the child's and the parent's records. Once the child and the case manager identify the information the child wants to put in the Life Story Book, the case manager will be prepared to verify the dates of placements, names, etc.
 - c) Involvement of significant others in the child's life (birth parent, foster parent, mental health therapist, etc.) as the child indicates interest. However, it is very important to reassure the child that his/her work is confidential. The Life Story Book is never shown to anyone without the child's permission.
 - d) Review of examples of other Life Story Books.

B. Case management responsibilities in assisting the child with understanding his/her circumstances

1. The child's Case Manager, in cooperation with the agency staff or foster parents, shall be responsible for:
 - a) Assisting the child in the development of the Life Story Book. The child's Case Manager must arrange for the supplies necessary to develop the book.
 - b) Assisting the child with events, feelings, and concepts that the child is having difficulty dealing with.
 - c) Assisting the child in validating those feelings and helping him/her understand what happened, but still maintain a sense of hope.
 - d) Being honest with the child to the extent that he/she is developmentally able to understand. The truth of the child's placement should not be hidden.
2. It may be necessary to consult with a therapist regarding any major issues that come up during the development of the Life Story Book.

C. Preservation and updating the Life

1. Case management staff and foster parents shall ensure that the child's Life Story Book is preserved and updated

Story Book

at significant intervals during placement. It becomes particularly important for the child preparing to go home to the birth parents or into an adoptive placement.

2. The Life Story Book shall be kept in the foster home of the child.
3. The Case Manager shall review the Life Story Book no less than once every three (3) months to ensure the Life Story Book is being updated on a regular basis and shall be documented in case recordings.
4. Children leaving custody may take their Life Story Book with them, along with the original birth certificate and Social Security card from the child's case record. Copies of the birth certificate and Social Security card are sufficient for any future needs the Department may have, at that point.

D. Supplies and materials

1. Basic materials and supplies may be obtained through the local DCS office supply procurement process, i.e., notebooks, page protectors, paper, tape, construction paper, etc.
2. Staff should refer any special needs to their local supply clerk, and if unavailable through normal supply channels, local funds may be used to purchase specialized items and to develop film.

Forms

None

Collateral Documents

None

Standards

DCS Practice Model Standard - 12-105